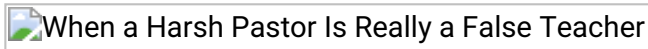


When a Harsh Pastor Is Really a False Teacher

Aaron Armstrong



It's a miracle my faith hasn't been totally shipwrecked.

I became a Christian as the Emergent mystique was reaching its high point. Rob Bell's *NOOMA* videos were all the rage, *Blue Like Jazz* was on everyone's bookshelf, and Brian McLaren hadn't completely abandoned the gospel... And as a new believer, I was immediately caught up in it, with no idea which way was up.

And then I found a *different* sort of teacher: the guy who wasn't afraid to tell the cold, hard truth. To get hot under the collar as he preached because he actually seemed to think the truth mattered.

And I was captivated. My course, doctrinally speaking, was righted, and I was off to the races. I was growing in my faith, growing in my understanding of the Bible (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/>)... but something was off. That something was my character. I knew the right answers, but I was hostile toward those who couldn't see that I was right. I was not exhibiting anything resembling patience, or joy, or humility... Whatever a mature Christian may be, I wasn't it.

And then I realized the problem: I'd traded one kind of false teacher for another.

Right answers, wrong practice

It's easy to think of all false teachers as being cut from the same cloth. Rob Bell and Oprah, Joel Osteen and TD Jakes... They're all the same, right? They all preach a "gospel" of personal fulfillment. Of creating or receiving our best life now. It's the gospel of us: we are the solution to the problems the world, and it's up to us to make this world what we want it to be.

While these are all false teachers, certainly, it's wrong to think that all false teachers are created equal. Not all false teachers are wrong in their doctrine. Some can check all the right boxes, and get all the right answers on the quiz, but they're just as hopelessly unhelpful as any prosperity teacher:

- They are harsh with God's people.
- They put themselves first.
- They preach a gospel they do not practice.

And they may be the most dangerous of all.

The kind of teacher we should embrace

When I look at Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/esv/2-timothy/passage.aspx?q=2-timothy+4:1-5>), I am floored by the contrast I see between this sort of teacher (and myself a few years ago), and the standard we are called to. We are to preach the Word in all times and all places, no question, but consider what Paul says about how to do this in verse two (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/esv/2-timothy/4-2.html>): "...Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

This means we are to communicate all that Scripture does: we are to instruct in doctrine, to correct error and to encourage God's people. We need to constantly be bringing people back to the truth of God's Word, to confront sin and encouraging Christians (<http://www.christianity.com/>) to follow the Lord faithfully.

To walk with people over long periods of time, to instruct them, correct them and encourage them, only to see them fumble and fall over the same issues, requires *enormous* patience. Complete patience, even, as Paul puts it.

To be a person marked by self-control. One who doesn't blow his top every time he gets frustrated, who isn't a bully in the pulpit. Who doesn't wield his authority as a weapon, haphazardly declaring men and women to be goats or swine, when they may well be people who simply don't know their right hand from their left as they struggle with the habits developed over a long life of sin and rebellion against God.

Maybe think about it this way: I have three kids, and because they are all very young, they tend to have the attention span of goldfish. So my wife and I constantly have to tell them the same things over and over and over again. And again.

Clean your room.

Don't be a tattletale.

Be kind to your brother.

Don't pull your sister's hair.

Eat your food.

Stop eating your boogers.

Don't pull your sister's hair.

It's easy to become frustrated when we get through the discipline process, the child acknowledges what they've done, asks forgiveness... and then goes off to do exactly the same thing they just got in trouble for! In those moments, it's sorely tempting to lose our cool (and sometimes, to our regret, we do).

Over time, we've started to see progress. One is learning to remember she's not a "little mommy." One is eating fewer boogers. And the other one... we're still working with. But every once in a while, he shows signs of empathy. (so that's something, right?)

It's the same way with our teachers. We need teachers—and *to be* teachers—who are willing to patiently instruct, correct and encourage. That control their anger when those under their care the same mistakes over and over again. That encourage the weak and weary, and point them back to their Savior. That put aside their expectations, and celebrate the successes along the way, no matter how minor they may be.

That's the kind of teacher I want. More importantly, it's the kind of teacher I want to *be*. What about you?

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